

#196: MAY 1–JUNE 1, 2014 A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

THE INDYPENDENT

WHY BRECHT FORUM CLOSED, p4 | RESTAURANT WORKER TALES, p6 | EXPLOSIVE JAZZ, p17



DAVID HOLLENBACH

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the reader's voice



Responses to "In Defense of Their Land and Water: A Photo Essay" in the April Independent.

It was my ultimate privilege to stand on the frontline with many powerful individuals and allies of our country — French, Acadian, Miqmac, Cree, Coast Salish, Mohawk. The strength we need to be aware of how we hurt Mother Earth is in my thoughts every day. I know the devastation caused by fracking and will continue to protect our watersheds and traditional lands with much ferocity and passion, with my fellow protectors, in a way that I hold dear to my heart and that is peaceful and respectful. I say, Hiy Hiy-Welalin.

— DAVE GOODSWIMMER
from indydependent.org

I'm so proud of my people for standing up for our way of life. We

will never give up or give in.

— AMANDA POLCHIES
from indydependent.org

The environmental impact of fracking is clear to anyone who cares to look at it. Although burning tires is far from the best way to show your knowledge and love for the environment...

— JAY
from indydependent.org

GOOD STUFF
Keep writing! What a well-done article ("Remembering St. Vincent's," April *Indydependent*). Just the right mixture of history, personal experience and social impact. Thanks.

— MAGGIE
from indydependent.org

ROOTING FOR THE BAD GUY
The author of this piece ("House of Cards Hurts So Good," April *Indydependent*) has expressed EXACTLY my, and probably the majority of most HOC viewers, take on the show. We know we should, at the very least, not like Francis Underwood, or Claire for that matter. But Francis draws us in by breaking that fourth wall, and sharing with us his true feelings and motives. By doing this, he makes us (un)willing accomplices to his schemes. I feel a temporary hint of guilt, only to turn around and root for Francis.

— MARKINA
from indydependent.org

RACE ON TRIAL
Thanks for this compelling review ("Jogging Our Memory," April *Indydependent*). I was among those who trusted the prosecutors, though not the media, at the time. I was working at *New York Newsday* as an op-ed page editor, and did not report on the jogger case.

In this case and others that turn on race, it is true that prosecutors and reporters orchestrated public psychodramas through the criminal justice system, not so much because they were racist or politically correct but because they were careerists who wanted a victory and moralists who wanted a compelling drama to back it up.

Someone did bludgeon and rape the Central Park jogger, and prosecutors played into preconceptions in their hunger to nail the case. But anyone who was mugged in Central Park during those years knows that the true perpetrator really may not have looked much different from those who were falsely accused. That does NOT justify false prosecutions, but neither does it justify using the example of false prosecutions to sweep away the actual problem, which was truly a consequence of overwhelming white racism that cannot be redressed by histrionic anti-racism.

— JIM SLEEPER
from indydependent.org

DIRECT YOUR RAGE
I found Harriet Fraad's review ("White Men's Rage," February/

March *Indydependent*) of Michael Kimmel's book, *White Men's Rage*, to be timely and very accurate.

I have been nervously watching the rise of the American far-right, the racist Tea Party and the growth of white hate groups in the United States. for years now. And unfortunately, these groups are armed to the teeth, deadly and growing.

Capitalism, too, is evolving, and now there are no more national economies, just one huge global economy. For white male workers, this means being exploited by chain stores, i.e. Wal-Mart, the low-wage service sector or worst yet being unemployed or homeless. In capitalism housing is not a right, nor is a decent job. Landlords too can bite for "market rent."

Lastly, this rage is very understandable, but directed at who? Who is at fault? Clearly it's the ruling elite of the United States and the world, not powerless poor and working people of color!

— EUGENE
BED-STUY, BROOKLYN

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EMPOWERING WOMEN & GIRLS: Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*, will speak at the New York Public Library on May 7.

SAT MAY 3
7pm • Free
REPORTBACK: THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ORAL HISTORY TOUR. Volunteer oral historians, independent journalists and producers, artists and activists have joined community organizations and social movement groups to document individual and collective histories across North America. Bluestockings Bookstore & Café
172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

SUNDAYS MAY 4–JUNE 22
2pm • \$15
PERFORMANCE ART: HONEYBEEALUJAH! Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping Choir will celebrate the mystery of the honeybee with spoken word and song for eight consecutive Sundays. Performances will highlight the role of agribusiness giants like Monsanto and the banks that back them in the release of chemicals into the environment that have caused bee populations to plummet worldwide. Joe’s Pub at The Public Theatre
425 Lafayette St
revbilly.com

WED MAY 7
12–1pm • Free
NYPL BOOKS AT NOON: WITH EVE ENSLER. Eve Ensler is an award-winning author and playwright whose works include *The Vagina Monologues*,

The Good Body and *Necessary Targets*. Ensler is the founder of V-Day, the global movement to end violence against women and girls. Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, Astor Hall
Fifth Ave at 42nd St
917-275-6975 • nypl.org

THU MAY 8
7pm • Free
SPEAKER: MAX BLUMENTHAL. The author of *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel* will discuss how Zionism and more than four decades of military occupation of Palestinian lands have affected Israeli society. Brooklyn Friends Meeting House
110 Schermerhorn St, Bklyn
718-624-5921 • brooklynpeace.org

FRI MAY 9–MON MAY 19
Various times • Festival Film Pass: \$60
CINEMA: WORKERS UNITE FILM FESTIVAL. Showcasing dozens of films from around the world that explore the lived experiences of workers and their efforts to unite and organize for better living conditions and social justice. Cinema Village
22 E 12th St
workersunitefilmfestival.org

THUR MAY 15
7–9pm • Free
DISCUSSION: RACISM & THE MILITARY. Tony

Award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang and composer Huang Rao will discuss their new opera, “An American Soldier.” It is based on the true story of Pvt. Danny Chen, a Chinese-American soldier who was bullied by his fellow troops in Afghanistan and later found dead in a guard tower. Advanced reservation is required. Email: programs@mocanyc.org. The Museum of Chinese in America
215 Centre St
212-619-4785 • mocanyc.org

FRI MAY 16
8pm • \$13
MOVIES: OPENING NIGHT OF ROOFTOP FILMS’ 18TH ANNUAL SUMMER SERIES. Rooftop Films is a NYC-based non-profit whose mission is to engage diverse communities by showing short films from around the world. Tickets available online or at the door. Industry City
1st Ave & 39th St, Bklyn
718-417-7362 • rooftopfilms.com

SAT MAY 17
8pm • \$18
PERFORMANCE: 50TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE TO FREEDOM SUMMER. Come kick off the summer with Peoples’ Voice Café’s last performance of the season, with Larry Rubin, Maggie, Marshall Jones and Luci Murphy. Peoples’ Voice Café
40 E 35th St
212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

SUN MAY 18
11–2pm • Free
STOP ‘N’ SWAP: PARTICIPATE IN WASTE PREVENTION AND MATERIAL REUSE. Bring clean and reusable items that you no longer need and take home items you can use. Acceptable items include clothing, house wares, games, books and toys. No

furniture or large items. No need to bring an item to take an item. Central Queens Y
67-09 108th St, Queens
212-788-7900 • grownyc.org/swap

THU MAY 22
11am–1pm • Free
ACTION: SILENT PROTEST FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS. A weekly event held every Thursday by the New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, an interfaith network of congregations, organizations and individuals resisting detention and deportation. 26 Federal Plaza
646-395-2925 • newsanctuarynyc.org

THU MAY 29- FRI MAY 30
All Day • Free
FESTIVAL: BROOKLYN YOUTH MEDIA. A two-day showcase of media produced by Brooklyn-affiliated youth under the age of 20. The media showcased captures the feel of urban life through short films, comedies, drama, music videos, documentaries and animation. BRIC Arts
647 Fulton St
718-683-5600 • bricartsmedia.org

FRI MAY 30-SUN JUNE 1
Fri 7–10pm, Sat-Sun 12–7pm • Free
EXHIBITION: “WATER WARRIORS.” Photographers Andrew Stern and Michael Premo’s documentation of the struggle of First Nation and allied land protectors in New Brunswick, Canada, against the intrusion of fracking will be featured during Bushwick Open Studios. Opening reception Friday, benefit dance party Saturday 9pm–1am, \$10 suggested. Be Electric Studios
1298 Willoughby Ave, Bklyn
beelectric.tv • artsinbushwick.org

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BE THE MEDIA!

HAVE YOU WANTED TO TRY YOUR HAND AT JOURNALISM BUT YOU’RE NOT SURE WHERE TO START? THE INDYPENDENT WILL BE HOSTING A COMMUNITY REPORTING WORKSHOP SATURDAY, MAY 10 FROM 1–5PM. WE WILL COVER THE BASICS OF JOURNALISM, INCLUDING LEDE WRITING, INTERVIEWING, RESEARCH AND STORY DEVELOPMENT. LIMITED SPACES ARE AVAILABLE. TO RECEIVE AN APPLICATION, PLEASE EMAIL US AT CONTACT@INDYPENDENT.ORG. SLIDING SCALE \$10–\$25.

The Brecht Forum

1975–2014

By JOHN TARLETON

Faced with hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt and finding itself in the legal crosshairs of its former landlord, the Brecht Forum announced April 12 that it will close after 39 years. The decision marks the end of an era for the Marxist education and community center, which will hold its final public forum on May 8 and will cease all business operations as of May 30. After that, it will move to dissolve itself as a non-profit corporation.

"It has become clear," Brecht's board of directors wrote in a public statement, "that in a rapidly gentrifying city, we have been living on borrowed time, and that despite the strong support of our community, this configuration of our project is unsustainable."

"It's a big loss," said Sam Anderson, co-chair of the 10-member board of directors. "I feel really, really sad we had to close up."

Anderson's sense of loss was mirrored in the larger Brecht community as the news spread on the Internet and across social media.

"I can't believe the news I just heard," wrote Vijay Prashad, a Brecht supporter and author of more than a dozen books, including *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, on Facebook. "How many tears, and how much laughter did we shed in the Brecht?"

"When I was a teenager in NYC, [Brecht] gave me sense of community that was so vital in Manhattan," wrote Bel Nogueira, another supporter. "The people I met at the Brecht showed me new ways of relating to each other and acting in the world politically. They were some of the first adults I thought I would like to be like."

"Is there really no way to raise the funds?" Another supporter asked. "I find this so hard to grasp!"

BRECHT'S ORIGINS

The Brecht Forum was founded in 1975 as the New York Marxist School by civil rights, student, labor and community activists who thought the radical movements of the previous decade had been weakened by an anti-intellectualism that privileged spontaneity over strategy and action over reflection. Their goal was to spur a deeper

understanding of how movements that arise in a given moment can relate themselves to larger historical processes.

Brecht's founders had also witnessed the New Left's splintering into small, doctrinaire revolutionary parties at the end of the 1960s and sought to create an ecumenical, non-sectarian space in which leftists from various perspectives could study, debate and learn from each other. Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism — the idea that changes in material conditions such as technology and productive capacity are the primary drivers of how society and the economy are organized — was presented not as infallible truth but as a methodology for thinking critically about the world.

"It was a place where everyone on the Left was welcome," recalled Bill Koehnlein, who in 1986 took a class in which he and about a dozen other students read and discussed Volume I of Marx's *Capital* on Sunday nights for a year. He has been an active participant at the Brecht since then. "That class changed how I saw the world and how I formed prescriptions for making change in the world," Koehnlein said.

MAKING A MOVE

Taking its name from the German playwright Bertold Brecht, the New York Marxist School incorporated itself as the Brecht Forum in 1984. It would endure through the Reagan Revolution, the stock market-driven boom of the 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Union and the "end of history" proclaimed by conservative intellectual Francis Fukuyama. With its 30th anniversary approaching, Brecht made a bold decision to leave its modest home in a Chelsea office building for a much larger venue that would present enormous challenges but offer the organization a chance to remake itself in a powerful way.

In 2004 Brecht signed a 10-year lease to move into the sprawling ground floor of a rundown brick building in the West Village. The group's board of directors envisioned the space becoming a bustling crossroads of Marxist popular education and movement building for the many disparate groups that make up the New York City Left.

Brecht's new landlord was Westbeth Artists Housing, a non-profit rental complex in the West Village for low and moderate-in-



POPULAR EDUCATION: A full house turned out for this 1979 Brecht Forum lecture.

come artists. Their lease agreement stipulated that rent was slated to gradually increase over a decade's time to more than \$8,000 per month. To make the building fit for use, a loan had to be taken out to finance more than \$200,000 in capital improvements.

"It was a leap of faith," recalled one Brecht supporter with close ties to the group's leadership.

Brecht's new home by the West Side Highway was a 15-20 minute walk from the nearest subway station and visitors to the new venue were slow to arrive at first. However, by 2008, Brecht had become a hive of activity. A younger and more diverse crowd poured through its doors, thanks to the work of two new staffers — Kazembe Balagun and Max Uhlenbeck — who were both under 35 and had extensive ties to youth and people of color activist groups across the city.

The Brecht was a place where Black nationalists and feminists, old-school Marxists, dreadlocked anarchists and community organizers of all stripes could gather. With regular panels, performances and classes on everything from introductory Spanish to Gramsci's revolutionary strategy, the Brecht was packed on many nights. At the monthly Game Night, you could blow off steam playing table tennis, foosball or Class Struggle, the Marxist version of Monopoly created by NYU professor Bertell Ollman. Big-name lefties like Tariq Ali, Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Cornel West and Slavoj Žižek spoke at Brecht events. After Wall Street crashed the economy, Marxist economist Richard Wolff's regular talks explaining the economic crisis became wildly popular.

"It was an exciting time," said Uhlenbeck, who stepped down as Brecht's director of



BACK IN THE DAY: Partying at the Brecht like it's 1989.

development in October. "The movement was using Brecht Forum."

All of this post-crash/pre-Occupy ferment at 451 West Street caught the eye of the *New York Times*, which observed in a 2010 profile that "in a city known for cynicism, the Brecht, which survives on donations, is a surprisingly open and idealistic place."

Despite Brecht's success as a community and educational center, it was straining to meet its rising rent and pay off the initial capital loan it had taken out to open the space. Big fundraisers like a Chomsky talk, given at a jam-packed Riverside Church in 2009, helped Brecht stay afloat but no more than that.

"We swam uphill the whole time," said Matt Birkhold, who has been Brecht's executive director since October 1 and who began volunteering at the organization in 2007. "We were always fundraising to catch up."

HURRICANE SANDY

In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy upended Brecht's fragile finances. The storm left the Brecht's building without heat or electricity for four months and the organization was unable to do any programming.



FAMILIAR FACES: (left to right) In recent years, staffers Liz Mestres, Kazembe Balagun and Max Uhlenbeck were familiar faces to people who visited the Brecht Forum.



COURTESY THE BRECHT FORUM



ROBERT O'HAIRE

CULTURAL PROGRAMS: The Joe Rigby Quartet performs at the Brecht Forum in July 2013.

"I don't think people understand the impact of Sandy," said Brecht board member Tami Gold. "We had four months without income while still having all our regular expenses."

With Brecht hemorrhaging money, the board decided in the spring of 2013 to vacate the space at Westbeth with one year left on the lease and move to a smaller, less expensive home. In October, Brecht came to the Brooklyn Commons in downtown Brooklyn, where it has been sharing space with WBAI-99.5 FM, the Right to the City Alliance and *The Independent*, among other groups. Brecht also dropped its staffing down to one full-time employee.

"We had to reduce ourselves to continue," Anderson said. "We would not have survived if we stayed at Westbeth."

As Brecht prepared to leave its home at Westbeth at the end of last September, it was approximately \$50,000 to \$80,000 in arrears on rent payments to Westbeth. The two parties disputed the precise amount of

back rent due, with Brecht claiming that it was not obligated to pay rent for the four months its space was unusable after Sandy. Once Brecht stanchd its losses, the board thought the debts to Westbeth could be gradually repaid.

The board also hoped that its decision to move out would persuade Westbeth to forgive the final year of the lease, worth about \$100,000. On September 27, 2013, Westbeth's lawyers sent an email stating that the last year's rent was still Brecht's responsibility. At the same time, Brecht's lawyer received an informal assurance from an official at Westbeth that the amount stood a good chance of being forgiven. However, Gold said no one on Brecht's staff or board of directors insisted that assurance be put on paper.

With rent and usage fees of under \$3,000 per month at the Brooklyn Commons and generally strong turnout for its events,

Continued on page 15



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When Tips Are Not Enough

BY ELEANOR J. BADER

As fast-food and low-wage workers nationwide fight for an increase in the minimum wage, many of New York's restaurant workers don't receive anything close to that amount. The reason? Lobbying by restaurant owners.

According to the website of the New York State Restaurant Association (NYSRA) — one of 50 chapters of the National Restaurant Association, a 95-year-old trade group dedicated to fighting “financial and regulatory obstacles before they hit our members’ bottom line” — one of last year’s premier accomplishments was keeping 200,000 tipped city restaurant employees stuck at the same \$5 per hour subminimum wage they’ve been earning since 2011.

Rahul Saxena, policy director at the Restaurant Opportunity Center of New York (ROC-NY), a Manhattan-based organization that advocates for improved salaries and working conditions for laborers in the city’s approximately 24,000 eateries, explains that the subminimum wage has been in effect since 1966. He told *The Independent* that, “nationally, the tipped wage has remained at its 1991 level, \$2.13 an hour, for 23 years.”

Yes, you read that correctly. In most of the United States, tipped restaurant workers — servers, bussers, bartenders and food runners — make just \$2.13 an hour. Seven states, however, have no subminimum. This means that by virtue of geography, restaurant staffers in Alaska, California, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington earn a higher base pay — their state’s minimum hourly wage — than their brothers and sisters in the rest of the nation.

In New York, tipped restaurant workers — largely servers, since cooks, chefs, dishwashers and other “back of the house” staff are typically paid more — earn the local minimum, a paltry 62.5 percent of the state’s \$8 minimum, or \$5 an hour. This discrepancy disproportionately impacts women, since 73 percent of tipped restaurant employees are female. “The economic security of workers should be a fundamental right,” Saxena said. “Most customers who eat out leave a tip to thank their server for good service. They don’t realize that they’re actually subsidizing a wage. Having to rely on the generosity of patrons adds a major level of stress to the job. We know that tips vary by season, by weather, by restaurant location, by the hours you work.”

Saxena’s outrage becomes more and more pronounced as he explains that state restaurant associations typically describe their employees as temporary workers — students, actors, writers and artists who are hoping to catch a break or finish school. “It’s a myth that this is a short-term job,” he adds. “For many, many people restaurant work is a career.”

Indeed, ROC estimates that 13 million people in the United States — 10 percent

of the labor force — work in some aspect of food service. What’s more, the National Restaurant Association projects overall sales of \$683.4 billion in 2014. Closer to home, the NYSRA reports that the industry took in a whopping \$33.6 billion in 2013 alone.

“As tipped workers, our minimum wage should be at least \$8 an hour,” says waitress Ayana Edwards.

Edwards has worked at the International House of Pancakes in East New York for four years. “The labor of being a waitress is very hard and dealing with the public is

not easy. In addition to serving people, we also have all the back of the house cleaning to do.”

Naomi Benn, who has worked with Edwards for three years, explains that at their workplace,

servers need to pay 15 percent of their gross sales to the busboys who clean the tables and restock supplies. In turn, the busboys tip the dishwashers. “On an average day, working from 7 am to 5 pm, I take home about \$100,” Benn reports. “Most people leave me 15 percent of the bill.”

Standing on her feet and keeping a smile on her face as she fills her orders is an expected part of the job, Benn adds. But she has also had to contend with sexual harassment from patrons. “When you’re friendly with male customers it can come off as flirtatious even when that’s not your intention. I’ve had guys waiting for me when I get out so our shift now leaves as a group, or we call cabs so that they’re outside when we leave.”

Some restaurant workers, like Camilo (who asked that his surname not be used), say that they have fewer complaints about their employers than they have about customers. Camilo has waited tables at two different Manhattan-based vegan restaurants since August 2013 and says that his bosses are not a problem.

“Both places are owned by the same people and they are themselves vegan.

How they think about animals and eating is reflected in how well their employees are treated,” he begins.

“We share our tips with everyone on the floor except the host or hostess and the person who prepares take-out and delivery orders. They’re paid between \$10 and \$13 an hour. A shift ranges from four to eight hours; if you work eight you get one paid 30-minute break. We’re also given a \$20 allowance for food per meal. Last Saturday I worked seven-and-a-half hours and took home \$182 in tips. On Thursday, I got \$130-something for eight hours.”

And the customers? “Some people are obnoxious,” he shrugs. “One of my co-workers served a salad to a woman who said she didn’t like it. When she was told that she had to pay since she’d eaten most of it, she took the fake ham from the plate and threw it at the server. Two weeks ago I had a customer who asked me about non-soy entrees but never said she had a soy allergy. She ordered something that had soy puree in it and when she discovered this she made a scene.”

An increase in the subminimum wage, of course, would do nothing to mitigate this.

For its part, ROC-NY recognizes that there is a burning need to address the disrespect that restaurant workers experience. To start, ROC-NY is promoting discussions about what fair treatment for

“We give our tips to management at the end of the day and we’re then paid once a week by check. We sometimes suspect that management is keeping something or that some servers are not turning everything over but there’s no way to find out. The big issue is that the pay is not steady. Some weeks it’s \$300, some weeks more, some less. Unlike other jobs there’s no paid vacation and until recently there was no sick time.”

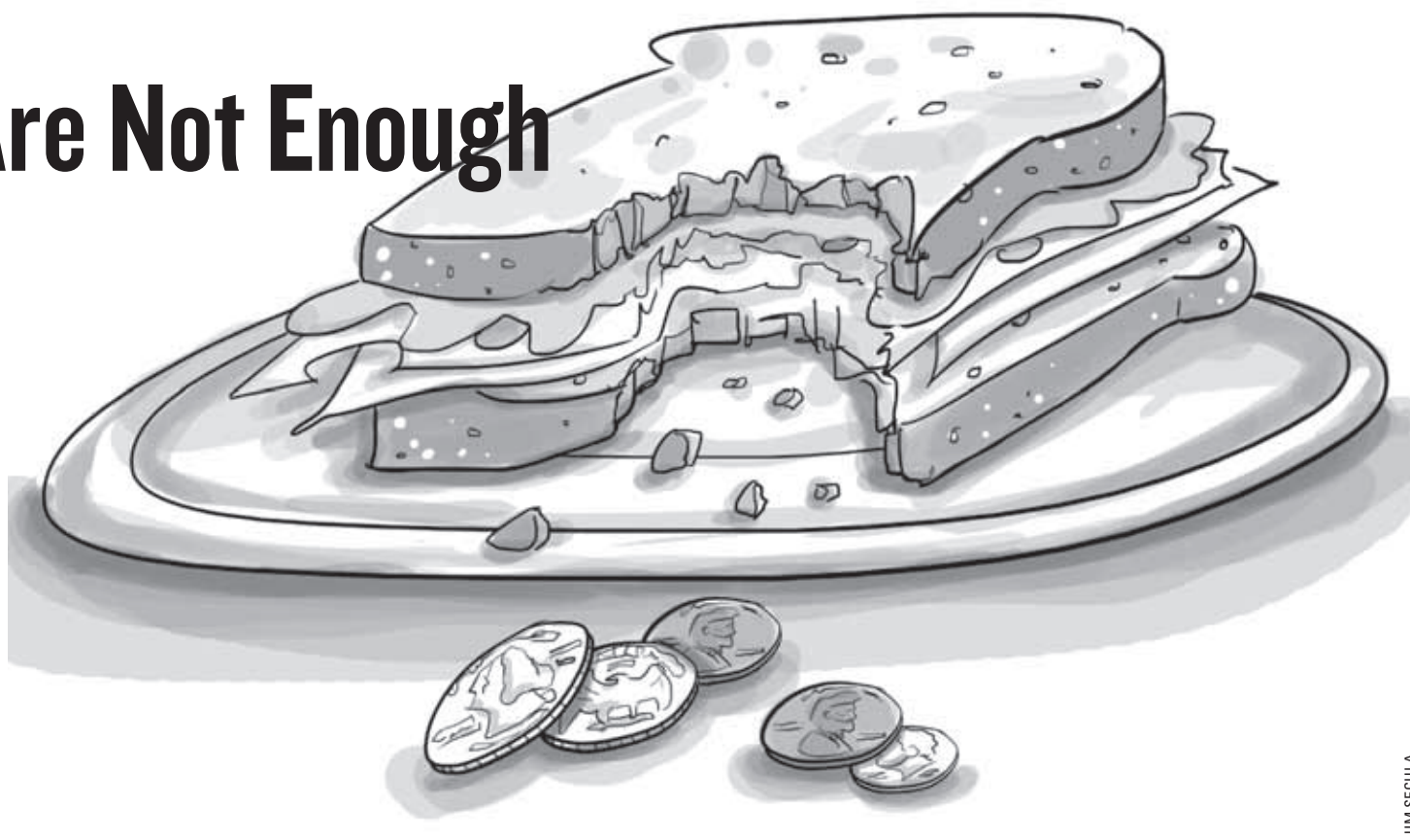
Like the other servers interviewed, Portillo has seen her share of disgruntled patrons. Another concern, she continues, is scheduling. “Some weeks if I’m only given three shifts, I’ll need to borrow money to make ends meet. It’s frustrating and does not have to be this way. If more people get involved we can change things.”

At the top of the list, of course, is upping — or better, eliminating — the subminimum wage. ROC-NY’s Saxena says that San Francisco, California, and SeaTac, Washington, have eliminated the subminimum and have increased the minimum to \$10.88 and \$15 respectively, a clear boon for tipped employees who now make the local minimum.

New York State, for its part, recently passed a minimum wage increase that will see the minimum rise to \$9 an hour in 2015, but that law excluded tipped workers. Gov. Cuomo is due to convene a wage board to investigate the issue. However,

despite pressure from ROC-NY and the Coalition for a Real Minimum Wage, he has been dragging his feet.

“We’re now videotaping restaurant workers in the city, asking them to describe what it’s like to work off tips. Our goal is to shift public discourse and pressure Governor Cuomo to address the subminimum wage,” Saxena says. “The fact that, on a national level, food service workers are twice as likely as other workers to qualify for food stamps is disturbing.”



JIM SECULA

**SCREAMING
CUSTOMERS AND A
SUBMINIMUM WAGE.**

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AND THREW IT AT THE SERVER.’**

Seattle's Elite Begin Their Counterattack

BY SHAMUS COOKE

Seattle's corporations were blindsided, it all happened so fast. Socialist candidate Kshama Sawant's successful City Council campaign tore through Seattle politics, leaving the 1% paralyzed and unable to cope with a movement they hadn't seen coming. The Seattle elite had no way to counter her arguments, silence her supporters or keep her from gathering a tidal wave of approval for the \$15 Now campaign to raise the minimum wage.

But Sawant's election victory was just the beginning. After singlehandedly transforming city politics, Sawant used her newly elected bully pulpit to torment the mayor and City Council and harangue Seattle's corporations, while simultaneously mobilizing thousands in the streets to ram through her progressive agenda. The corporate elite didn't know what to do. They conceded defeat and agreed to a \$15 per hour minimum wage — in rhetoric.

Sawant didn't buy it, refusing to declare victory until it was in her hands. After the mayor and the City Council created a committee to implement the \$15 minimum wage, Sawant was sounding the alarm bells, correctly predicting that such a radical change would never be accepted without a fight by Seattle's wealthy, who would eventually recover from their shell shock and regroup to attack.

That attack is now beginning. But a direct assault isn't possible yet. Sawant's position is fortified by her broad-based support. Thus, the 1% are playing a long game, using a combination of tried-and-true tactics, where they'll "agree" to Sawant's demands on one hand while slandering her as an "extremist" on the other, all the

while proposing a plan for a \$15 wage with just enough loopholes to render it meaningless. For example, the corporations want a \$15 wage that includes "total compensation," meaning that the costs of any benefit — like health insurance — could be counted as part of a worker's salary, thus changing the definition of minimum wage.

These are some of the tactics being employed by the newly-formed Seattle corporate front group "One Seattle," whose members include some of the largest corporations in the world. Another one of the group's strategies is to create the illusion of a middle ground between themselves and Sawant. Since "mom and pop" are more lovable than Starbucks' multimillionaire CEO, they intend to use middle-class small business owners as proxies in

ONE SEATTLE, A NEWLY-FORMED CORPORATE FRONT GROUP, INCLUDES SOME OF THE LARGEST BUSINESSES IN THE WORLD.

the war. This plan to win the hearts and minds of the public by putting forward the friendly face of small business owners was recently exposed by the *Stranger*, a weekly Seattle newspaper, which revealed a leaked One Seattle memo that detailed the "small business strategy," as well as other aforementioned tactics that Seattle's biggest corporations were going to use to undermine Sawant and the \$15 Now campaign.

But One Seattle is still playing defense against Sawant, who continues to show no hint of mercy. Having predicted that the City Council would stall, Sawant and \$15



KEEPING UP THE PRESSURE: Seattle's socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant speaks at a rally in favor of boosting the city's minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

Now have been threatening to go over the heads of the Council by organizing a public ballot measure initiative.

The Seattle elites are terrified of the ballot initiative. One of the City Council members who claims to be in favor of \$15 complained, "I hate the idea that we're pressured to make a decision [about \$15] because of the ballot threat."

This quote reveals, in small part, the inherent power of the demand: it's gathered such broad support that politicians are forced to react, and none dare to oppose it. It's also forced politicians and corporate hacks to debate the demand publicly, extending the reach of the issue to working people all over Seattle.

The campaign inspires confidence in working people, who for decades have been taught to act defensively, if at all. \$15 Now is the first time in years that working people have gone on the offensive. This is precisely the type of confidence that union workers need in order to demand higher wages at the bargaining table, and the type of self-assurance that non-union workers need to demand a \$15 minimum wage and a union.

It is also a demand that will make a huge difference in the lives of working people on the low end of the wage scale. It will

help unite the working class by bringing the bottom up closer to the rest of the class, it will help reduce growing wealth inequality and it will help unions recruit by demonstrating that they can play a significant, positive role in the lives of working people.

But this battle can't be limited to Seattle. Fortunately, groups across the country are adopting the \$15 demand. A \$15 minimum wage victory was won in SeaTac, Washington, at the end of 2013, and activists and progressive lawmakers are making strides on the issue in Davis, California, Chicago and New York City. Another front opened in the battle when Sawant spoke in Portland on April 24, and it came alongside the recently announced offensive in San Francisco, where SEIU 1021 announced that they would also pursue a \$15 ballot measure.

The ultimate success of the \$15 demand will depend on the energy, organization and resources dedicated by labor and community groups, combined with the mobilization of the broader community. Do we have it in us to go on the offensive, as Sawant has?

This article was adapted from an earlier version that appeared on common-dreams.org.

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF THE INDYPENDENT?

BELOW 14th ST.

- Seward Park Library
192 East Broadway
- Bluestockings
172 Allen St.
- LES People's Federal Credit Union
39 Avenue B
- Native Bean
50 Avenue A
- Key Food
52 Avenue A
- Theater for the New City
155 First Ave.
- Tompkins Square Library
331 E. 10th St.
- Cinema Village
29 E. 12th St.
- St. Mark's Books
31 Third Ave.
- Mamoun's Falafel Restaurant
22 St. Mark's Pl.

Theater 80

- 80 St. Marks Pl.
- McNally Jackson Books
52 Prince St.
- Shakespeare & Co.
716 Broadway
- Think Coffee
248 Mercer St.

14th TO 96th ST.

- Epiphany Library
228 E. 23rd St.
- Muhlenberg Library
209 W. 23rd St.
- Chelsea Square Restaurant
W. 23rd St. & Ninth Ave.
- Columbus Library
942 Tenth Ave.
- Manhattan Neighborhood Network
537 W. 59th St.

ABOVE 96th ST.

- Bloomingdale Library
150 W. 100th St.
- Aguilar Library
172 E. 110th St.
- Harlem Library
9 W. 124th St.
- George Bruce Library
518 W. 125th St.
- Countee Cullen Library
104 W. 136th St.
- Hamilton Grange Library
503 W. 145th St.
- Uptown Sister's Books
W. 156th St. & Amsterdam
- Fort Washington Library
535 W. 179th St.

BROOKLYN

- Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Pkwy.

Brooklyn Library

- 1044 Eastern Pkwy.
- Tea Lounge
Union St. & Seventh Ave.
- Verb Café
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.
- Purity Diner
43 Underhill Ave.
- Pacific Street Library
25 Fourth Ave.
- Outpost Café
1014 Fulton St.
- YWCA of Brooklyn
30 3rd Ave.
- Wyckoff Starr
30 Wyckoff Ave.
- Kaisa's Café
146 Bedford Ave.
- Bedford Library
496 Franklin Ave.
- Parkside Deli
203 Parkside Ave.

Brooklyn Commons

- 388 Atlantic Ave.
- Atlantis Superwash
472 Atlantic Ave.
- Brooklyn Borough Hall
209 Joralemon St.

QUEENS

- Astoria Library
14-01 Astoria Blvd.
- Aubergine Cafe
49-12 Skillman Ave.
- Terraza 7 Live Music
40-19 Gleane St.
- Jackson Heights Library
35-81 81st St.
- Corona Library
38-23 104th St.
- Flushing Library
41-17 Main St.

BRONX

- Mott Haven Library
321 E. 140th St.
- The Point
940 Garrison Ave.
- Mothers on the Move
928 Intervale Ave.
- Hunt's Point Library
877 Southern Blvd.
- Woodstock Library
761 E. 160th St.
- High Bridge Library
78 W. 168th St.

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'The Moment We Lost Our Way'

INTERVIEW BY JOHN TARLETON

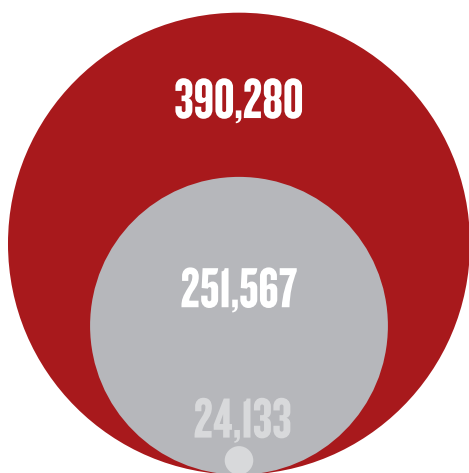
Roberto Lovato has been immersed in the struggles of this country's Latino immigrants for more than a quarter century. The son of El Salvadoran immigrants, Lovato headed the Central American Refugee Center during the 1990s and co-founded *Presente.org* after the mass immigrant rights marches of 2006. There, he built a hub for online Latino political advocacy. In 2009, he designed and led the nationwide Basta Dobbs campaign that forced CNN to drop the notorious Latino-bashing television host Lou Dobbs from its lineup.

A prolific writer and commentator, Lovato's work has appeared in an array of English and Spanish-language newspapers and websites. With the number of deportations carried out by the current administration estimated to have recently surpassed 2 million, he has developed another pressure campaign — the Obama Immigration Legacy Project — which is working to channel the Latino community's growing anger over continued deportations directly at the President and force him to shift to a more humane and positive course. There have been some early signs that this more confrontational approach is having an impact on the White House (see page 10). For Lovato, it's simple: judge your erstwhile friends and allies not by what they say but by what they do.

JOHN TARLETON: Democrats and Republicans are blaming each other as a comprehensive immigration reform bill has stalled once again

DEPORTATIONS THEN & NOW

AVERAGE DEPORTATIONS PER YEAR



OBAMA ADMINISTRATION
TOTAL: **1,951,400** (2009–2013)

BUSH ADMINISTRATION
TOTAL: **2,012,539** (2001–2008)

FROM HARRISON TO CLINTON
TOTAL: **2,630,532** (1892–2000)

8 May 1–June 1, 2014 THE INDEPENDENT

Sources: DHS 2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, ICE ERO Annual Report 2013

in Congress. Yet, you say this initiative was never meant to succeed.

ROBERTO LOVATO: The “campaign” for comprehensive immigration reform began around 10 years ago. Since then, we have seen all manner of excuses from both Democrats and Republicans for lack of action while the situation of immigrants has sunk to the lowest state in our lifetimes. Under Obama, 2 million mostly Latino people have been deported, most of whom are innocents who have no criminal record.

Most people in the Latino community didn't realize Obama was on his way to being the worst immigration president until he was in the White House for five years. A major reason why has to do with how “immigration reform” was used by the Democratic Party to divert attention to the legislative branch and the Republicans and away from the dastardly doings in the executive branch. But, the votes needed to pass immigration reform were never there in Congress. As a result, “comprehensive immigration reform” has become the new Mexican sombrero of Latino politics. Politicians of all stripes think they can get Latinos to vote for them by mouthing the phrase “comprehensive immigration reform” just as they used to wear a sombrero or call out “Viva Cinco de Mayo!” or “Viva Cesar Chavez!” That's why I call this the “Si Se Pedro” (Yes, We Fart) politic; it sounds like something good until you get close and spend time with it.

JT: Obama and his supporters argue that he's just enforcing existing immigration laws and that Republicans are thwarting his desired changes.

RL: Somehow Obama has enforced the very same laws as Bush in a way that has led to a doubling of the rate of deportations. Were it Bush or some other politician, we would be calling it travesty and a disgrace and storming the White House. Obama's immigration madness began in 2009, back when just a lonely few of us were sounding the alarm. Now the majority of Latinos is alarmed and fed up.

JT: There was so much momentum at the time of the historic immigrant rights marches of 2006. What happened?

RL: After the 2006 marches, the Bush administration stepped up raids and deportations by the Department of Homeland Security to put the hammer down on the immigrant community and make people afraid to step out and protest.

The second thing that happened after 2006 was the acceleration of a multi-million conglomerate known as “Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR).” Even the most liberal versions of CIR promised to exacerbate all the worst parts of the failed immigration system. Knowing this, a cabal of interests including major foundations, some big labor unions, big immigrant rights and Latino organizations in Washington, D.C., and the Democratic Party all came together around immigration reform and designed their efforts to channel the energy of 2006 into support for the Democratic Party. This produced overwhelming cries of “Si Se Puede” and Latino support for Obama in 2008 and again in 2012.

This worked for a long time until those of us on the left wing of the immigrant rights

movement like the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, left-leaning DREAMers, Detention Watch Network, *Presente.org* and many local groups started exposing the hypocrisy of Obama and the Democrats.

JT: Following Bush and now with Obama, to what extent do we have an immigration industrial complex composed of state officials and private interests that are entrenched around the current status quo?

RL: There is a bipartisan interest in maintaining systems of isolation, control and repression of Latino and immigrant communities. The immigration industrial complex was born of a Democrat, Bill Clinton, expanded by George Bush and given steroids and a robocop outfit by Barack Obama. This complex, first analyzed by Deepa Fernandes and I, consists of politicians from both parties and local communities that live off of and vote for policies and money for jailing immigrants. The complex also includes the private prison industry, military and surveillance technology companies among others.

JT: Are there other underlying reasons for why the United States has continued militarizing its southern border besides the fact that it's a profitable business for private companies to get in on?

RL: The simple and simplistic — and wrong — answer is that Obama and the Democrats are playing “tough” to win votes in Congress and in elections. Top migration and climate scientists will tell you another story, the story of how something on the order of a billion people on this planet are potentially going to be uprooted by climate change in this century. They will travel to the north from the south, which is going to absorb the brunt of climate change as we are already beginning to see. South-to-north migration is also occurring not only in the Americas but in Asia and in Europe where they are putting up border walls with lots of boats and weapons in the waters between Africa and Europe. Even southern countries in Latin America have their own “immigration problems.” Criminalizing immigrants is an excuse to militarize the border in preparation for millions of people marching north because of climate change. Other explanations are insufficient at best and diversionary lies at worst.

JT: How much does racism account for the anti-immigrant backlash?

RL: There's definitely a racial dimension. I went to Arizona about a decade ago when the Minutemen were conducting self-styled border patrols. I found ex-farmers who had been globalized out of existence by big agribusiness, industrial workers whose factories had moved away from Arizona, military people who lost their jobs following Clinton's downsizing of the military. The appeal to white fear makes a lot of sense to these abandoned workers who wanted an explanation for what was happen-



ROBERTO LOVATO

FIERCE CRITIC: Roberto Lovato says the immigrant rights movement is waking up after being deceived by the Democrats for much of the past decade.

ing to them. It's much easier for politicians to say “them immigrants took your jobs” than “your jobs got evaporated by capitalism.”

JT: What would you want immigration reform to look like?

RL: The first true measure now of anybody's commitment to immigrants is to stop the deportations. The immigrant condition has been so degraded that we have to start there. Anything else, including “comprehensive immigration reform,” is a farce. When you hear National Council of La Raza and others saying, “the Republicans have to support comprehensive immigration,” they are not being sincere. They are playing with people's lives to protect the Democrats. Important next steps should include ending programs like Secure Communities that make mass deportations possible and a more aggressive use of executive powers by Obama to halt deportations. Without forcing changes the Executive, the Democrats and Republicans will continue foot-dragging on legalization and other major changes.

JT: Is there a way to work with the Democrats going forward?

RL: The best way to deal with the Democrats or any party is from a position of autonomous power. We have to do everything in our power to free the immigrant rights movement from the Democratic Party. The great tragedy in immigrant rights is not just Republican hostility toward immigrants, but the cynical calculations that humiliated and turned the immigrant rights movement and Latino electoral power into an appendage of the Democratic Party. The moment we started down that road was the moment we lost our way. The “strategists” and “leaders” at D.C. groups that have received hundreds of millions of dollars in funding since 2004 have nothing, *nada*, to show for it except a worsened immigrant condition and a humiliated Latino politics that was subservient to the Democratic Party until this year.

An independent immigrant rights movement means we can unite and begin the necessary fight against the criminal justice system that makes immigrant rights a criminal justice issue. We can't do it alone in our silos, so why not work together? This is where our energy needs to be, not in the Democratic Party.

JT: After all these years, you are still hopeful?

RL: As hopeful as ever. The Latino and immigrant communities are fired up and awake like they were in 2006 — and then some. I feel like the hummingbird that can sense the dawn coming even though it's completely dark. My wings are flapping like they haven't flapped since 2006.

MIKAEL TARKELA

Tested by Language

By EMILY GILES & ROSIE FRASCELLA

For most high school teachers and students, this time of year means Regents prep. The stakes are high as students must pass all five of their state-mandated Regents exams — each covering a different subject area — before they can receive their high school diploma. Everyone feels the pressure. Some students, though, feel it more than others.

Take, for example, a 7th year student at our high school for English Language Learners in Brooklyn. She has done three extra years because she hasn't passed the English Language Arts Regents Exam. She has taken it multiple times and every time she receives a score around 60, just points shy of the 65 she needs to graduate. Less than five points keep her from graduation, a diploma and moving on.

This student is an English Language Learner (ELL), one of more than 150,000 such students in New York City. The graduation rate of ELL students is well below the citywide graduation rate of 60 percent. Unfortunately, the personal challenges students face are compounded by the kind of high-stakes standardized tests that parents, teachers and top educators at the NYC Department of Education are starting to question.

High schools have the second highest concentration of English Language Learners in the system, but have the highest number of students that were born outside the United States. What this means in practice is that high schools have the largest group of students that are learning a new language, but also acclimating to a new culture and home environment.

IMMEDIATE PRESSURE

Students that enter as teenagers begin to feel the pressures of graduation requirements immediately. Despite multiple studies that have shown people need anywhere from five to 10 years to academically master a new language, students that enter New York City schools as 9th graders are still expected to graduate in four years.

Imagine two different students attending public high school in Brooklyn. Student one: raised in an English speaking home, surrounded by books, newspapers, TV and conversation in English. Student one has consistent school attendance and has attended public after-school and summer enrichment programs. Student two: born and raised in Guinea, attended school on and off in French and speaks Fulani at home. Student two arrived to New York City at the age of 15 and entered 9th grade.

Student one has been tested her entire life. She is fluent in English and familiar with the format of the test as well as cultural references. Student two is an avid language learner and is almost fluent in spoken English after two years, but has little experience with testing and is still learning to read and write in English.

These two students face the same graduation requirements. They both must pass their five New York State Regents exams with scores of 65 or above. English Language Learners are allowed extra time on Regents exams, they are al-

lowed to use translating dictionaries and have access to the exam in their native language. While helpful, these accommodations are meager compared to the challenges ELL students face.

GATEKEEPER EXAM

The English Language Arts (ELA) exam is an exception — no translated exam and no dictionaries are permitted. All the exams are a challenge, but it is this exam that often plays graduation gatekeeper for so many English Language Learners.

For many students, the main lesson they learn from the tests is that school equals failure. They begin to question their ability to succeed in school at all. Teachers too, feel the sting of failure each time we have to tell a student they have not passed an exam. They worked their hardest, and so did we, and it wasn't enough.

The students that do make it through graduation face new challenges. CUNY schools determine a student's "college readiness" based on their Regents scores. Students that score below a 75 on the ELA Regents and below an 80 on the Algebra I exam have to take a college entrance exam to determine their class placement. Many ELL students end up assigned to take remedial courses before they can enroll in entry-level college classes. The remedial classes end up draining financial aid or personal college funds, but do not count as college credits. What's more, they sap a student's confidence in the idea that college is for them.

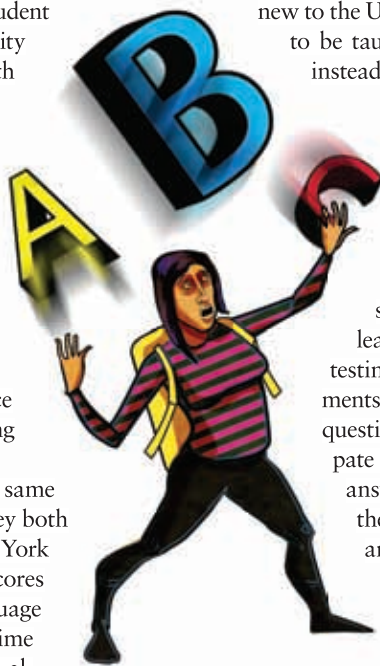
These exams, and the new Common Core exams, are part of a movement of high-stakes testing plaguing New York City schools. The students that bear the brunt of the injustice of these tests and what they do to our classrooms and school communities are often students who are learning English. In elementary schools, parents have begun to opt their children out of high-stakes testing, and even Chancellor Fariña has put forward policy that says promotion will not depend solely on test scores. In high schools, though, tests are as high-stakes as ever.

Over-testing, and the use of test scores to determine promotion, graduation and access to higher education are ultimately issues of justice. Students that are English Language Learners, about half of whom are also immigrants, are being denied a full education.

The problem is not only that students have to pass the tests to graduate, but what that means for classroom instruction. Students that are new to the United States and English have to be taught the structure of the test instead of developing the critical and analytical skills they need in college.

PORTFOLIO-BASED ASSESSMENT

The best way to help students acquire language skills and feel good about learning is to move away from testing to portfolio-based assessments in which students create questions, research them, participate in their community to find answers, and then go through the process of writing about and sharing what they have learned. Teachers, students and school communities



Continued on page 12

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presents

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Co-founder of Global Exchange & CODEPINK

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Max Blumenthal

Author of "Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel"

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Visiting Scholar: Project on the Two Sudans, Program on Peacebuilding & Rights, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University

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TIME TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Rallies, Blockades, Hunger Strikes Greet Deportation Milestone

By RENÉE FELTZ

“We now know that 2 million people have been deported under the Obama administration. We’re saying enough of that!” Rosa Lozano defiantly announced at an April 5 protest in the nation’s capital, where hundreds had gathered to mark the record number of removals. The milestone was especially galling because President Obama has argued he had to increase immigration enforcement before he could deliver comprehensive immigration reform.

For Lozano, and millions of immigrants and their loved ones who face deportation, patience has run out.

“We’re not going to be silent, and we’re not going to stop marching, and we’re not going to stop participating in acts of civil disobedience,” Lozano continued, “until Obama takes us seriously and uses his executive order to give our communities relief, because we know that we don’t need Congress for that.”

By “we,” Lozano is largely referring to the growing number of immigrants who are coming out of the shadows to join marches, direct actions and hunger strikes. And “relief” is now more immediate than the much-debated path to citizenship.

The call is for Obama to take actions that would stop deportations, for example, of anyone who would be eligible for citizenship under the immigration reform bill that passed in the Senate last year. Or he could extend a memo he signed in June 2012 called “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals,” which halts the pending removal of young people who came to the United States as children and have been in school or the military. Another option is to end the Secure Communities program that Bush began but Obama expanded, in order to target so-called “criminal aliens.” Recent figures show two-thirds of those deported under Obama committed only minor infractions, such as traffic violations, or had no criminal record at all.

The April 5 rally where Lozano spoke was one of 80 events held nationwide that day, organized and largely attended by immigrants and their allies, under the slogan, “Not One More.” It was followed by the launch of a rotating hunger strike at the doorstep of the White House.



SUFFERING IS SPEAKING: Immigrant rights activist Alejandro Gonzalez was one of 19 people arrested on April 17 after blockading the entrance to the Suffolk County House of Correction in Boston.

BEHIND THE WALLS

Many of these actions have been spurred on by a rise in resistance behind bars — from those directly facing deportation. Far from the nation’s capital, hundreds have rallied in support of the migrants on hunger strike inside the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington. Weekly vigils during which supporters read messages sent out by detainees are held outside the center.

Mora Villalpando, a Tacoma activist and undocumented immigrant with the group Latino Advocacy, told Free Speech Radio News that the hunger strikers serve as real-life examples of how current immigration policies divide families, and their goal is to change the discourse around the issue of immigration reform. “They’re doing this for their children because they want their children to see that, although they might be deported, they fought. First, to have their children live better lives, but now they’re fighting to keep families together.”

Many of those protesting inside the Northwest Detention Center, which is run by the private prison company Geo Group, have been placed in solitary confinement as punishment, prompting a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union. This hasn’t stopped the tactic from spreading. Similar hunger strikes have been confirmed at detention centers in Eloy,



OUT LOUD: Andrés del Castillo speaks in Boston on April 17.

Arizona, as well as in El Paso and Conroe, Texas.

When Manuel Martinez, one of the hunger strikers in Conroe, was deported, his daughter and wife traveled from Houston to Washington, D.C., to join the rolling hunger strike in front of the White House.

“My dad is my hero and I’ll do whatever I have to so he can be home again,” explained 13-year-old Melanie Martinez.

On the same day she arrived, 19 people were arrested outside a detention center in Boston when they chained themselves together to block the facility’s entrance. One of them addressed his speech to President Obama in a video that was posted online and went viral.

“You are tearing us apart!” said Andrés del Castillo. “I direct that message directly to the president of the United States of America, Barack Obama! That is to you, as a son of an immigrant! As a son of someone else that comes from a different land, you should know better than any that we deserve rights, that we deserve dignity, and you should be recognizing our families!”



DEMANDING ACTION: Hundreds of members of the National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON) marched on the White House on April 5 to mark the date they estimate President Obama passed the 2 million mark in immigrant deportations.

ing our families!”

As *The Independent* went to press, the Obama administration announced it may take steps to limit deportations of immigrants without serious criminal records. The response, says Pablo Alvarado, head of the National Day Laborers Organizing Network, came “because suffering is speaking. Affected communities have protested. They have marched. They have engaged in direct civil disobedience. And as a consequence, they have made sure that the end of deportation becomes Plan A. So the question now is not whether the president will act; it’s when will he do it.”

Renée Feltz is a producer and criminal justice correspondent for Democracy Now! (democracynow.org).



FAMILY VALUES: Immigrant parents push a baby stroller during a protest outside the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington.



NYC ID: Tania Mattos of Queens hopes city leaders will enact a municipal ID law this year.

NYC Ready for Municipal ID

By ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA

In May 2012, Tania Mattos took out her bicycle and went for a ride in Corona, Queens. It had been a while since she’d been on a bike, and when she got frightened of the speeding cars, she rode onto the sidewalk instead. It wasn’t long before a pair of cops stopped her for violating New York City traffic laws.

“I was so scared,” Mattos said. At 30 years old, she is an immigrant and labor rights organizer, but after having been brought to the United States by her parents from Bolivia when she was a child, she was undocumented at the time of the encounter. “The cops asked me for ID, and I told them

I didn’t have one, none at all — I ended up telling them my entire life story. In the end they let me go, but I think it’s only because they felt bad for me, because I’m a girl and I spoke English well.

“I have a prior deportation order, and if I would’ve been taken into jail they would’ve seen that. I would’ve been deported.”

Valid identification is a requirement for many aspects of modern New York City life, from accessing public spaces and services to opening bank accounts, signing lease agreements and often, dealing with the police. As deportations continue at a high rate nationwide and immigration reform remains stalled at the federal level, New York has become the latest city to take immigration

graph, name, date of birth and address. To issue it, the city would accept a wide variety of documents proving identity — including foreign passports, consular IDs and military service cards — and residency.

The estimated half million undocumented immigrants who live in the city are widely seen as the primary beneficiaries of a municipal ID, but other groups stand to benefit as well, including transgender people, the homeless, youth, the low-income elderly and those reintegrating into society after incarceration.

“The idea of having the security and the confidence that comes with having an ID that you know is accepted by municipal government and authorities is a big benefit

that people are excited about,” said Daniel Coates, a lead organizer of the municipal ID campaign with Make the Road New York. Once the idea — after being introduced but failing to gain traction in 2007 — garnered momentum during the 2013 mayoral campaign, the group built a diverse coalition that includes local immigrant, LGBT, homeless and other rights groups to advocate the issue.

“We’re being very intentional about building this, and working with the city to build it in such a way that it maintains that confidence,” said Coates. Creating confidence is perhaps most crucial in relation to law enforcement. The possibility of encounters with the police, like the one Mattos found herself in while riding her bicycle, represents a real and inescapable fear for many undocumented immigrants. Not being able to present valid identification can lead to arrest and then, detention and deportation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the federal Secure Communities program. Immigration advocates behind the bill hope that if passed and implemented, the ID will be respected by police officers and provide immigrants some measure of protection.

“It can mean the difference between

Continued on next page


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Continued from page 9

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Emily Giles and Rosie Frascella are both New York City public school teachers. Giles teaches 9th and 10th grade students science while Frascella works with 11th and 12th grade ELL students who are preparing for the English Language Arts Regents exam.

Municipal ID

Continued from previous page

getting deported or not,” said Mattos. “It’s a really very difficult, very tumultuous time for undocumented immigrants. We’re being deported at really high rates, and so something like an ID can mean the world of a difference for a family.”

The draft bill introduced in City Council also creates the option of self-designating one’s gender. Transgender people disproportionately face discrimination in obtaining jobs and housing, entering public spaces such as bathrooms and in encounters with police, especially when their gender presentation does not match the gender stated on their IDs. The process of getting gender-affirming identity documents is lengthy, expensive and for many, due to “medical documentation” requirements, out of reach.

“It is such a powerful intervention,” said Elana Redfield, the director of the Survival and Self-Determination Project at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. “It’s going to make a huge difference in people’s ability to participate in the economy, to access public spaces, to show this ID when they get stopped by the police, if that happens.” She hopes that the municipal ID will also be accepted as a foundational document in applications for other forms of identification, such as driver’s licenses, passports or birth certificates.

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Despite all that a municipal ID can offer, it can also carry risks. “Implementation is going to be really important — the devil is in the details,” cautioned Johanna Miller, advocacy director at the New York Civil Liberties Union.

One of the primary concerns among immigrants and advocates is how to prevent the card from becoming a “scarlet letter” for the undocumented or any other marginalized group of people. As the logic goes, it is necessary to bring the card into widespread use among all New York City residents, so that members of vulnerable groups cannot be immediately identified as such — and then potentially face discrimination or harassment — when they use the card.

“It’s only going to be successful if we’re able to make it an ID for everybody,” Coates said.

Cities that have already created a local ID card have used a range of incentives to make the card attractive to all residents, with varying success. These include partnering with public institutions and local businesses to create special benefits or discounts for users of the card, building the ID to double as a debit, library or transportation card and more. As *The Independent* went to press, hearings for the bill introduced by Councilmembers Menchaca and Dromm were slated to begin on April 30. If the legislation is passed, it will be up to the mayor’s office to implement the program and establish the necessary incentives.

Protecting the privacy of ID card users will be crucial. Shortly after New Haven’s rollout of its municipal ID card in 2007 — the first such program in the nation — an anti-immigration group now known as the Community Watchdog Project attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to obtain the names of all individuals who had been issued the card through Freedom of Information Act requests.

“The city of New Haven had a nightmare scenario,” Miller said. However, she feels confident that the proposed bill has the necessary privacy protections to prevent a similar situation. In administering the ID program, the city would not retain the identifying documents that people would submit with their applications and treat the information as confidential.

LIFE WITHOUT AN ID

Exactly how much of a relief this ID would be to immigrants, and what kind of momentum it might provide on other immigration issues on the city and state levels, remains to be seen.

“I feel like people have learned how to cope without having an ID,” said immigrant rights activist Marco Saavedra. Born in Mexico and raised in Washington Heights, Saavedra was among the Dream 9 activists who infiltrated the Florida-based Broward immigrant detention center in 2012 and the undocumented youth who crossed into Mexico and attempted to legally re-enter the United States in summer 2013. He mentions that while it may not be perfectly convenient, many services in the city are still within reach for undocumented immigrants; those include bank accounts with Chase and CitiBank, which accept foreign passports and consular IDs.

“Hopefully the municipal ID serves as leverage to push for more things, instead of a superficial remedy,” he said. For his part, Saavedra would prefer to see concrete policies further limiting NYPD and ICE cooperation and establishing universal attorney representation for detained immigrants. Meanwhile, nationally, 15 states have passed some version of the Dream Act, which grants undocumented college students varying access to in-state tuition rates and financial aid, 11 states allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses and consideration for these and other measures is underway elsewhere. In comparison, New York’s record on progressive immigration policy is paltry.

“We’re catching up,” Mattos said. But while prospects for citywide immigration initiatives have brightened since Mayor Bill de Blasio took office, significant — and controversial — state policies may still be out of reach. “In New York you can’t even pass the New York Dream Act, because the state government is completely broken. If the New York Dream Act isn’t going to pass, driver’s licenses aren’t going to pass.”

Obamacare's Empty Victory

BY MARGARET FLOWERS

It feels truly Orwellian that progressives are applauding the forced purchase of private health insurance — one of the most hated industries in the United States — while the right is opposing a model that originated from their political leaders. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is a step farther on the path to total privatization of our health care system, not towards the health care system that most Americans support: single payer Medicare for all.

In the months leading up to the March 31 deadline to obtain health insurance, ACA supporters united around their mission to enroll people. Volunteers knocked on doors and tabled in their communities. Celebrities and athletes tweeted and labor unions ran robocalls. The media buzzed with speculation about whether the ACA would succeed or fail. March 31 felt like election night. And after it was over, ACA supporters clapped each other on the back and celebrated.

Obamacare survived. But now that the law is implemented and the dust is settling, it's time to question what this actually means for health care and what we should do now.

Before President Obama was elected in 2008, Drs. David Himmelstein and Stefie Woolhandler, two of the co-founders of Physicians for a National Health Program, raised a crucial question in their report, "Our Health Care System at the Crossroads: Single Payer or Market Reform?" They outlined the health care crisis and how past reforms were taking us toward increasingly "threadbare insurance coverage." Knowing that health care reform would be front and center for the next few years, they argued that as a nation, we had a choice to make. We could stay on the same path toward a market-based health care system or take an evidence-based approach and create national single payer health insurance.

With the ACA, we have now passed that crossroads and are headed down the road to a completely market-based system of privatized health care. This is not something to celebrate. Dr. Adam Gaffney recently wrote an excellent history in *Jacobin* on the turn we have taken away from the concepts of universal health care and economic justice to a neoliberal model. We are inundated with market rhetoric telling us how wonderful it is to have the choice of shiny silver insurance in the brand new marketplace. Insurance plans are called products and we are consumers of them.

The problem with these public relations messages is that having health insurance doesn't guarantee access to health care and health care doesn't belong in the marketplace. As patients, we do not have a choice of whether or not to purchase health care when we need it. Delaying or avoiding necessary care can and does have serious consequences. And we can't predict how much

health care we will need or when we'll need it. In a market-based system, profits are the bottom line and people receive only the amount of health care they can afford, not what they need.

The ACA is transferring hundreds of billions of public dollars to the private insurance industry to subsidize plans that leave people underinsured, unable to afford care and at risk of financial ruin if they have a serious accident or illness. And even at its best, tens of millions of people will remain without insurance.

Most of the 7.5 million people who purchased health insurance on the exchanges were already insured. More than 80 percent bought the lower-tier silver, bronze or catastrophic plans with the hope that they would not get sick. These plans have the lowest premiums but require that patients pay thousands of dollars out of pocket before insurance kicks in, and then pay 30 to 40 percent of the cost of covered care. The result is that underinsured people will continue to self-ration, delay or avoid care due to cost, as 80 million of us did in 2012.

The ACA includes regulations, but as usual the insurance industry has ways to work around them. Many insurers had caps on out-of-pocket costs waived. Insurers also found a way to "cherry pick" the healthiest customers by leaving cancer centers and major medical centers out of their networks. In fact, most of the new plans have narrow and ultra-narrow networks that shift more of the cost of care onto patients because care outside of insurance networks isn't covered. And while insurance companies cannot drop individuals when they get sick, they can stop selling their plans in areas that don't make a profit. Some are already doing this, which means the competition that was supposed to emerge did not. Instead, in 515 of the poorest counties in 15 states, only one insurance company is available on the health exchange. And greater consolidation of the health care system is underway through mergers and acquisitions.

Our public insurances, Medicaid and Medicare, are being increasingly taken over

MOST OF THE NEW HEALTH CARE PLANS HAVE NARROW PROVIDER NETWORKS AND SEEK TO CHERRY PICK THE HEALTHIEST CUSTOMERS.

by private insurances in the form of Managed Care Organizations and Medicare Advantage. They compete for the healthiest patients and siphon more of the health dollars for profit, salaries and administration than public insurances. Top advisors to the White House expect our public plans to be rolled into the health exchanges in the near future with subsidies, a plan similar to Congressman Paul Ryan's voucher proposal.

Nations that treat health care as a public good and not a commodity have universal

coverage that costs less and produces better health outcomes. And in polls, some two thirds of Americans support single payer. Now our task is to shift the national debate away from how many people have insurance to what type of health care system we support. Efforts to do this are taking place at both state and national levels.

State efforts to educate and organize for universal health systems are using a human rights framework. This started with the Health Care is a Human Right campaign in Vermont that is working to create universal coverage, and similar organizing is happening in Maine, Pennsylvania and Maryland. An essential component of this organizing model is to develop leadership within communities that are uninsured or underinsured. States such as Washington, Oregon, Colorado and New Mexico also use human rights messaging in their campaigns.

State health reform faces significant barriers because federal legislation is needed to allow the creation of a state single payer system. However, state campaigns are essential because they push state health policy to be the strongest it can be and build an informed and organized grassroots movement that can also push for solutions at the national level.

Legislation for single payer health systems exists in Congress. In the House,

Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) has introduced HR 676, "The Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act," in every session since 2003. So far it has 56 co-sponsors. In late 2013, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced SB 1782, "The American Health Security Act," in the Senate. National organizations are working together to encourage more members to sponsor them and a national lobby day is happening in Washington, D.C., on May 22.

On a personal level, I have chosen to be a conscientious objector to the ACA. I cannot in good conscience give my support to the very industry I am trying to eliminate. Being a conscientious objector is a decision that people have to make for themselves. So far nearly 500 people have joined me by signing a petition at PopularResistance.org.

Some people speculate that the ACA will bring us to single payer some day because it will fail. This will only happen if we fight for it. Every day that we delay, people suffer and die in this country unnecessarily. Neil H. Buchanan says it best, "The ACA is as good as it gets, when it comes to basing a health care system on private insurance, and it is simply not good enough. Even as the ACA takes effect, therefore, we need to start planning to make it disappear."

Margaret Flowers is a pediatrician and co-chair of the Maryland chapter of Physicians for a National Health Plan. She serves on the board of Healthcare-Now and of the Maryland Health Care is a Human Right campaign. She is also an editor at popularresistance.org.



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Brecht

Continued from page 5

Brecht seemed poised to begin exiting its financial crisis.

“Things were looking so good,” said Gold, an Emmy-nominated documentary filmmaker who took her first Marxism class at Brecht in 1977. “We were going to get out of this hole.”

POWER PLAY

With Brecht’s financial outlook improving but Birkhold having to do the work of three people to keep the organization afloat, the board wanted to begin fundraising for a second staff position. However, in January, Westbeth’s lawyers began sending notices to Brecht stating that it was on the hook for the full amount of its 2014 rent in addition to all previous back rent and that it was prepared to take legal action to collect payment.

“This whole move was premised on a complete inaccuracy in regards to our relationship with Westbeth,” said Birkhold.

The board decided to postpone its fundraising plans until Westbeth’s claims were addressed. On April 1, Birkhold, Board Treasurer Christy Thornton, board member Pam Brown and the organization’s lawyer gathered at the Brecht office to hold a conference call with Westbeth’s lawyers.

According to both Birkhold and Thornton, Westbeth’s lawyers reiterated their demand that Brecht make good on all its debts, including the full 2014 rent, and asserted that they would pursue the matter “to the furthest extent of the law.” As a commercial landlord, Westbeth can sue to garnish assets in order to satisfy payment.

Thornton said that when Brecht’s representatives inquired about making a smaller initial payment, Westbeth’s lawyers told them that paying off \$80,000 in pre-2014 back rent would be the starting point for reaching a final settlement.

“That was a floor, and that seemed pretty impossible,” said Thornton, who served as Executive Director of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) from 2004-2009.

Between its debts to Westbeth, internal “friendly” debts of more than \$100,000 and the \$100,000 per year that it would cost to fill two staff positions, the Brecht was looking at financial obligations that were pushing \$400,000. Meanwhile, its main creditor was threatening to come after its bank account.

It was checkmate.

On April 6, the board met at Tami Gold’s Brooklyn home to decide on the organization’s fate. By a vote of 8-0 with one abstention and one member absent on paternity leave, the group decided to dissolve the organization.

“The decision to close was a responsible one because you can’t operate under the cloud of that kind of debt,” said Gold.

“There will be no recourse for [Westbeth] after having forced us into this dissolution,” Thornton affirmed.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

An April 12 email message from the board, titled “An End Is A Beginning,” urged supporters to remember that “the larger project of the Brecht Forum is clearly not over” and that the demise of the Brecht as an organization “only signals the need to organize harder and smarter, to find a sustainable way to build

movement power and support popular education in New York City.”

“The enormous commitment remains,” Gold said. “People are coming up to me and saying, ‘Oh my God! I don’t want this to go.’”

Uhlenbeck suggested that a Brecht-like organization could continue putting on events and conducting classes out of other groups’ spaces. But, he added, any hopes of once again running a project on the scale the Brecht previously achieved would require having a space to work out of. This in turn would present the same economic challenges that Brecht spent the past decade grappling with.

“There’s a great need, but the fundraising work needs to be figured out,” Uhlenbeck said.

For her part, Thornton said she thought members of the Brecht community would likely disperse and start or join a variety of activist projects and enrich them with the knowledge and experience they gained at the Brecht.

The discussion about how the Brecht community should move forward is slated to continue in a public meeting scheduled for Thursday, May 15. In a sign of what may lie ahead, a venue for the meeting still had not been confirmed when *The Independent* went to press.

HARD TO SAY GOODBYE

Meanwhile, the board is focusing on carrying out the dissolution of the organization. Birkhold said he expects it will take four to six months to wind it down. Going broke isn’t cheap, and to minimize expenses the Brecht is seeking a pro-bono lawyer who specializes in non-profit law, Thornton said.

During the final week of April, Brecht volunteers helped break down the group’s office at the far end of the narrow second floor hallway in the Commons. Ducking my head in, I saw a stack of cardboard boxes full of neatly filed papers marked “Tamiment,” the NYU-affiliated library that serves as the repository for the ephemera of countless radical organizations and movements. Inside the boxes were neatly organized folders full of financial documents, grant applications, curriculum, promotional materials — the regular output of a living, breathing organization now embalmed, as it were, and ready to be carted off to its final resting place.

“We probably would have made it if Westbeth hadn’t come after us,” Birkhold said in his friendly twang, shaking his head slowly as if to say, “What can you do?”

The demise of the Brecht has been emotionally wrenching for longtime members who have dedicated 20, 30 or even 40 years of their lives to the project. It’s also been tough for Birkhold, who was hired last fall to revive a faltering organization and instead finds himself presiding over its burial.

“It’s heavy,” he said early one evening as we sat and talked on the roof

of the Commons building. “It’s like a breakup you really don’t want to do but know it’s got to be done.”

Once he is laid off, Birkhold said, he will go on unemployment and finish his dissertation.

I asked him which quote from Marx came to mind when he thought of the Brecht’s demise. He brightened and then paused for a moment before providing a gender-neutral paraphrase of Marx’s observation in the *18th Brumaire*, that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please ... but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”

The sun swung low, hanging just above the residential houses in front of us while a chill blew across the roof of the Commons. In the life of an individual, or an organization, I wondered, is it better to stay within one’s known limits, or to burn brightly for a moment at the risk of flaming out?

“Was the Brecht’s decision to move to Westbeth worth it?” I asked.

“The move put us in a position where we were rowing upstream every day,” Birkhold said, weighing his words carefully. “It also put us in a situation where Brecht was making amazing contributions. Both were true at the same time. I wish it were simple as either/or, but it’s just not.”

The intellectual in Birkhold then suddenly came to life. “Two ideas that contradict each other can both be true,” he pointed out before breaking into a gale of laughter. “Man, Hegelian logic has never been more practical in my life!”

WEB EXCLUSIVE

What would Karl Marx have to say if he were able to come back to life today? Nicholas Powers takes a crack at giving voice to a 19th century prophet trying to make sense of a 21st century world.

indypendent.org/letter-karl-marx



MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: Brecht Forum Executive Director Matt Birkhold has kept the organization running during its last months.

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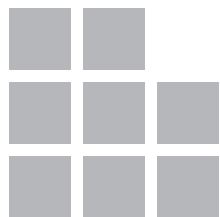
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EXHIBITION



COURTESY EDELMAN ARTS

STANDING BY HER WORK: Betty Tompkins with her paintings in 1973.

Art in the Flesh

Aftershock: The Impact of Radical Art
EDELMAN ARTS
Through May 12

“We had to spray our windows so you can’t see through, and cut the shades down, because we have schools on this block.” This is what curator Dara Schaefer tells me about her exhibit, “Aftershock: The Impact of Radical Art.” As we talked about the fleshy, explicit imagery on the walls of Edelman Arts, a gallery located on a leafy stretch of the Upper East Side, a stream of elementary-school kids — with uniforms and lacrosse mallets — passed by outside.

Among the artworks behind those frosted windows is a pair of Marilyn Minter’s late 1980s/early 1990s paintings, sourced from dirty magazines and rendered with a glossy, pop-y polish. If these kinds of pictures — of fondled breasts and orgiastic blowjobs — feel common (even a little quaint) in our era of endless, instant-access porn, it should be remembered that back then, that wasn’t at all the case. Or at least such images — presented in a high-art context by a female painter — were controversial enough to seriously derail Minter’s art career. Minter has said that these works were meant to raise questions about what it means, of what happens culturally and ideologically, when a woman embraces the hardcore visions of heterosexual porn. Twenty-five years on, and with pornography more prevalent in our culture than ever before, those questions still have no easy answer.

“Aftershock” is a small but lively exhibit about how American art has paralleled and fed into struggles for women’s rights and sexual liberation. It bears noting, though, that this “radical” spirit — as mentioned in the show’s title — doesn’t apply to class or economic issues. On its surface, really, much about

this exhibit doesn’t sync up with the ethos of “radical” politics. Indeed, though ostensibly a not-for-profit show, it’s being presented in what seems to be a highly profit-driven venue: the gallery is a project of Wall-Street-shark-turned-art-dealer Asher Edelman.

But look a bit closer, and the links to social movements are there. For example, Thomas Lanigan Schmidt’s mid-1980s assemblages gather together a host of religious and cultural symbols to make a sparkling, unmistakably queer and highly personal cosmogony. Mickalene Thomas’s recent, large-scale photos combine 20th-century fashions with an unfussed sense of immediacy to create singular portraits of Black women: conflicted images that seem to both affirm and reject common tropes of magazine-friendly glamour. Carolee Schneemann’s classic 1975 performance *Interior Scroll* found the artist, naked and covered in mud, reading a text (about issues of film and representation) as she slowly pulled it from her vagina, locating the female body as a source of knowledge and authority.

The best reason to see the exhibit (and perhaps the main reason why this show had to be hidden from the local children) is the work of Betty Tompkins. Like Minter, Tompkins gained art-world notoriety with a series of paintings sourced from pornographic photos. But while Minter’s work feels brassy and loud — inspired as much by glitzy nightclubs as by art history — Tompkins’s paintings seem to come from fascinated reverie: black-and-white ruminations on the strange mechanics of heterosexual intercourse. Tompkins started these works during the throes of 1970s feminism and returned to the concept in the mid-2000s after the original paintings started to receive some long-overdue recognition. “Aftershock”

presents some of these latter-day works and, while the show doesn’t have any of the initial suite of paintings, it does include a wonderful 1973 photo of Tompkins herself, looking somber and demure alongside the giant penises and vaginas that she had set to canvas.

Elsewhere in “Aftershock,” there’s a 1991 artwork by Cary Leibowitz (also known as Candyass), an exponent of the slacker-y early-’90s aesthetic known as “Loser Art.” The installation, called “No Peeking,” includes some homoerotic photos and general nods to Leibowitz’s queer/Jewish identity, but the work traffics mainly in a more generalized frustration: a text-painting that reads, “I am a miserable AND selfish person,” a pennant emblazoned with “GO SADNESS,” a necktie embroidered with the word “LOSER.” What emerges most from Leibowitz’s piece is a sense of the artist as a struggling human subject, and this may be the main theme of “Aftershock” overall.

Images of bare genitals and unfiltered sex still have the power to shock from gallery walls and yet, sexuality is a nearly universal aspect of human experience. The term radical has lately been identified with massive change and upheaval, but the word derives from the Latin *radicalis*: “of or having roots.” As with the gay-rights and feminist movements that inspired them, the works in this show mainly seek to affirm, realize and honor a sense of shared, essential humanity. Betty Tompkins made giant paintings of people having sex; in the sense of rootedness, of collective human struggle, what could be more radical than that?

— MIKE NEWTON

'Light, Love & Power'

INSPIRED: William Hooker pounds the drums and cymbals during an April 21 performance at the Clemente Soto Vélaz Center in the Lower East Side.

BY DAVID MEADOW

The William Hooker Trio burned up the Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural and Educational Center on April 21. They played as part of the highly-eclectic Arts for Art series, which showcases experimental and improvised art forms, and were the final act on a bill of avant-jazz-oriented outfits that ran the gamut from hard-driving post-bop to serene musings on fiddle and guitar. Hooker's ensemble, though, was the most explosive of all. Other critics have used words like "slash-and-burn" and "maelstrom" to describe the veteran drummer's approach, and I don't believe any of us are complaining.

The trio's performance was essentially one extended piece, an hour long, with discernible "movements," dominated by each member in turn and signaled largely by discreet but authoritative hand gestures from Hooker. The thread that ran through it all was Hooker's repeated incantation: "Let light, let love, let power restore the plan on earth." When he first uttered it, in the near-silence at the very top of the set, he was squeezed into the corner of one of the wings of the proscenium stage, and his words were quiet and matter-of-fact enough that, for a moment, I thought he was poking his head through an unseen hatch in the wall and bidding the organizers in the hallway outside to adjust the lights.

However, as he solemnly pivoted around, the words became clearer and more urgent — and, as he settled into his drum set, they were a shouted exhortation. With that, Hooker, 67, launched into a furious solo thudding of all drums, rolling and rattling, cymbals blazing. The jagged jitters of frantic ride-and-snare dialogue hurtled forward at a speed the ear could barely keep up with.

The next musician to grab the reins was pianist Mark Hennen, bestriding the length of the keyboard, advancing his fingers across

the notes with vigor. His movements had an air of dance to them: two fingers on each hand were forming little homunculi stomping the keys like a refined Punch and Judy fighting it out. Broadway, Art Tatum and Tin Pan Alley hovered faintly and knowingly in the crevices of semi-tonal, semi-discordant wash, while Hooker sat grandly in his corner of the wing, taking it all in.

Hennen and Hooker wrangled together for a time, and then came the cue for their bandmate, Matt Lavelle, to join in. He alternated among the trumpet, Flügelhorn and clarinet — and he would later genially confirm to me that that's a rare combination indeed. Lavelle was very much in minimalist mode, blowing the shrill, clear blasts of a herald on the brass and weaving deceptively simple passages on the reed. Here and there he threw in the wail of an ecstatic klezmer goosing a hora, or a low moan from one of clarinetist Eric Dolphy's radically reinvented spirituals.

Somewhere in the middle of all this, the leader came in with the incantation, no longer exhorting, but sagely and with assurance, à la Sun Ra. Each time he spoke, the energy shifted. Anything resembling quiet was a pause between movements; no one movement was still or hushed, and my attention was rapt the whole time. The closest the set came to balladry was a moment when the churn of the instruments suggested violent natural phenomena like volcanoes and tidal waves, and then a moment of slight, collective restraint seemed to take us soaring over the top of the smoking mountains, the roar muffled and the wind whistling in our ears.

When it was all over, and the last piano key had been pounded, the last hot breath had blasted through



BANDMATES: Matt Lavelle plays the trumpet, accompanied by Mark Hennen on piano.

the brass and the last cymbal ecstatically crashed, Hooker bookended the affair with a final iteration of his watchword — which, by now, we were all keenly expecting. He emphasized each word as though hearing it for himself with new ears and sensing a deeper meaning, his new understanding hard-earned through the tumult. With his tone of voice, the drummer seemed to be saying, "My concepts of light, love, and power have shifted, but this is still my wish and I'm sticking to it."

Tracing some of Hooker's history, we find a fiercely eclectic and open-minded player. While he and his collaborators are clearly steeped in the great jazz traditions, as they showed during this performance, the artist has found multiple sub-niches in contemporary music, playing venues like the storied CBGB and collaborating with rock giants like Thurston Moore. Hooker has also stated in interviews that he doesn't necessarily buy into the line, now familiar in out-jazz circles, that "you have to learn to play 'in' before you can play 'out.'" Considering this, we can see this concert making the ultimate statement of pluralistic unity: we may communicate in a common language, and recognize some of our favorite words and phrases with relish, but we mustn't forget how many ways there are to learn a language and how many different experiences a word or phrase can reflect.

For more, see williamhooker.com.

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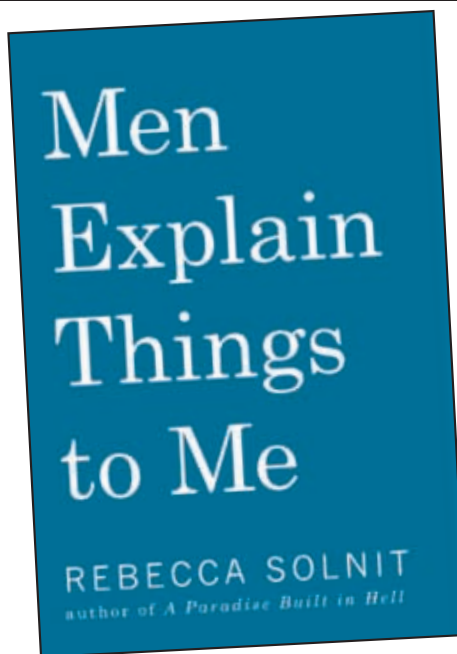
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DAVID MEADOW



IN HER COMIC, scathing essay "Men Explain Things to Me," Rebecca Solnit took on what often goes wrong in conversations between men and women. She wrote about men who wrongly assume they know things and wrongly assume women don't, about why this arises, and

how this aspect of the gender wars works, airing some of her own hilariously awful encounters.

She ends on a serious note—because the ultimate problem is the silencing of women who have something to say, including those saying things like, "He's trying to kill me!"

This book features that now-classic essay with six perfect complements, including an examination of the great feminist writer Virginia Woolf's embrace of mystery, of not knowing, of doubt and ambiguity, a highly original inquiry into marriage equality, and a terrifying survey of the scope of contemporary violence against women.

WWW.HAYMARKETBOOKS.ORG

In the Doghouse

The Watchdog That Didn't Bark: The Financial Crisis and the Disappearance of Investigative Journalism

By DEAN STARKMAN
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014

The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap

By MATT TAIBBI
SPIEGEL AND GRAU, 2014

Legendary newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer famously urged his reporters to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Hollywood classics from *His Girl Friday* to *All the President's Men* have given us a cultural archetype of a hard-charging reporter as the scourge of the preening and the powerful. Pretensions aside, the mainstream media consistently fails to live up to this heroic ideal. But there have been exceptions, and exceptional practices. “Accountability reporting,” or investigative reporting, is one of them.

This is writing that goes deep, asks hard questions, examines systems as well as individuals and, in its purest form, is not just descriptive and true, but subversive. Always the runt in a world of moneyed press tycoons then and globalized corporate media now, it's shrinking further.

The predominant form of business writing isn't investigative. It's incremental, contextless and moralistic where it should be cumulative, historical and moral. It's “access reporting,” which in most mainstream-media business coverage — with such notable exceptions today as the *New York Times'* Gretchen

Morgenson — is little more than insider market-messaging for investors and the top of the business class. At its worst it's rewritten press releases, mergers and acquisitions horse-race results, and stock quotes for market junkies.

Dean Starkman, a longtime *Wall Street Journal* writer and now a Columbia University Journalism School professor, does a huge public service in his richly detailed and highly readable new book by teasing out what has been good about mainstream business press practice. While he sets his gaze on established media institutions — he pays no attention to outside voices such as the socialist, labor, foreign-language or underground press — he knows there were enough examples of solid reporting to make his case that the media has and can do better. Among those he savors are the early 20th century muckrakers, including Ida Tarbell, whose classic *The History of the Standard Oil Company* set the stage for the breakup of John D. Rockefeller's company and Bernard Kilgore, the legendary *Wall Street Journal* editor who Starkman says “brought storytelling, narrative, in-depth reporting and investigations to financial news and, in doing so, revolutionized both it and American newspapers in general.”

Now it's all prizing elite over dissident sources and scoop reporting over long-form analysis. In short, it's putting profiling ahead of probing.

The shift toward “greed is good” as an ideological trope accelerated after the introduction of CNBC in 1989 and the growth of an almost endless supply of market-oriented websites for the 24/7 news era. The *New York Times Deal Book*, launched in 2001, was an insiders' e-newsletter honchoed by Andrew

Ross Sorkin, who got his break at age 22 as a Timesman reporting on mergers and acquisitions.

Sorkin is a poster boy for the we-don't-probe genre. *Too Big to Fail* — his best-selling 2009 post-mortem on the 2008 economic crash he never saw coming — is so centered on the doings at the executive-suite level that, says Starkman, he “steadfastly declines to look beyond the months leading up to the crash, so readers are left without the context to understand that nearly every individual named in the book played significant roles in causing the crisis.”

ANOTHER KIND OF JOURNALISM

One outcome of the press's business-enabling reporting is losing any coherent understanding of the dangers in the growing gap in wealth, income and political power. In *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*, former *Rolling Stone* contributing editor Matt Taibbi starts with a fair question: why, when poverty rates rose and crime declined, did the prison population correspondingly explode. He then looks at how history's greatest single plundering of wealth — the fraudulent sale of toxic, subprime mortgage-based securities by the biggest banks to pension funds and municipalities — led only to a flurry of civil trials but not to criminal prosecutions. He contrasts that to the routine, extreme brutality of police toward inner-city residents and the disregard for the humanity of undocumented workers in ICE sweeps and routine traffic stops.

Why, he urges us to consider, are single mothers living on public assistance jailed for minor drug offenses when HSBC Bank can launder \$850 million in Mexican drug cartel

money and get off with a fine? Why does a fare jumper at 125th Street get jail time for breaking a municipal law while a bank that breaks 50 state laws receives a financial slap on the wrist?

Taibbi's reporting, most of it original, is superb, though I'm not satisfied with Taibbi's answers. Yes, he makes the case that the rich are advantaged in hiring a string of \$1,000 per hour legal help to frustrate even the most committed prosecutors. Yes, the Securities and Exchange Commission has been dozing for years. Yes, key Wall Street financiers move through government circles like extended family members at a July 4 picnic. All true, and his reporting on it is must-read. The big question is, why is it tolerated?

Throughout *The Divide*, Taibbi refers to the legal system's hypocrisies as insane and racist (which they are) and increasingly likely to be meted out to the so-called middle class as the wealth and power divide widens, but he spends almost no time investigating why our culture so deeply supports and even applauds such blatant discrimination. And just when you think he will, he lands on one more excruciating story of blatant abuses.

Taibbi's case against a dominant culture that brutalizes the poor and lionizes the powerful is unshakable. Why it persists and what can be done to challenge it goes unexplored. It is up to the rest of us to supply the answers.

— MICHAEL HIRSCH



GARY MARTIN

MAY THEATER LISTINGS

THE COMPLETE AND CONDENSED STAGE DIRECTIONS OF EUGENE O'NEILL, VOLUME 2

WRITTEN BY EUGENE O'NEILL
ADAPTED & DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER LOAR
PRESENTED BY THE NEW YORK NEO-FUTURISTS
Now a Broadway mainstay, Eugene O'Neill was once considered an experimental, downtown playwright. His plays defied the melodramatic conventions of the day. The New York Neo-Futurists return O'Neill to his experimental roots with their follow-up to the Drama Desk-nominated *The Complete and Condensed State Directions of Eugene O'Neill, Volume 1*. By removing the dialogue and stripping the plays down to pure action, O'Neill's eloquent yet obsessive and often controlling stage directions become a rip-roaring physical comedy.

April 29–May 11
Wed–Sat, 8pm; Sun, 3pm
Additional performance on Mon, May 5, 8pm
THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

155 1st Ave
Tickets: \$25
nynf.org

JANE THE PLAIN

WRITTEN BY AUGUST SCHULENBURG
DIRECTED BY KELLY O'DONNELL
PRESENTED BY FLUX THEATRE ENSEMBLE
Football, popularity and the clash of the gods: it's all going down at Plainview High School's homecoming game in this comic fairy tale. Jane's status takes a sudden rise after she saves the mysterious Glowing Girl and is given the gift of beauty. Everyone starts falling for her: quarterback Scotty the Hotty, second-stringer Lesson the Decent, even the most popular girl in school, Lexi the Sexy. As the jealous Betty the Pretty seeks to eliminate her newfound rival, Leonard the Awkward tries to win his best friend Jane back. But when another mysterious god, the Mirror Man, starts haunting Scotty, this battle of love and social status takes a dangerous turn of cosmic proportions. What if the wrong choice in high school really could end the world?

May 9–12, 15–17, 19–23, 7:30pm
May 24, 2:30pm & 7:30pm

THE 4TH STREET THEATRE
83 E 4th St
Tickets: \$18, \$15 students
fluxtheatre.org

ENCHANTED ARMS

WRITTEN BY BEN CLAWSON, STACIE LENTS, JOSEPH PALESTINA & JOHN WOOTEN
CREATED BY BEN CLAWSON
DIRECTED BY ARTEM YATSUNOV
PRESENTED BY STRANGEDOG THEATRE COMPANY
Four screwed-up fairy-tales: The Big Bad Wolf wears a short, short skirt, Rumpelstiltskin is tenured in the Ivy league and Rapunzel is bleeding heavily from the scalp. Plus, Prince Charming seems to be developing a drinking problem. Hot off a nearly sold-out run at Luna Stage in New Jersey, the nomadic bi-state StrangeDog Theatre Company crosses the Hudson with their evening of new plays that grab four age-old fairy tales and throw them into a dilapidated apartment building.

May 15–31
Thu–Sat, 8pm
UNDER ST. MARKS
94 St. Marks Pl
Tickets: \$15

horsetrade.info

MEIN UNCLE

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ALIZA SHANE
PRESENTED BY 3 VOICES THEATRE

Based on the true story of Geli Raubal, niece to history's most infamous villain, Mein Uncle, this fairy tale about the seeds of inhumanity is a love story ruled by mystery, obsession and ultimately, madness; it is an account of love gone terribly wrong and an absurdist look at the bizarre secret relationship that influenced the man behind the darkest event of the 20th century.

May 29–June 8
Mon, 8pm; Wed–Sat, 8pm; Sat & Sun, 2pm
THE ROBERT MOSS THEATER
440 Lafayette St, 3rd Fl
Tickets: \$18
3vtheatre.com

— Listings provided by ROBERT GONYO and the GO SEE A SHOW! podcast, goseeashowpodcast.com.



WORKERS UNITE!

MAY 9–
MAY 19,
2014

FILM FESTIVAL

FRIDAY, MAY 9
OPENING NIGHT

Salute to the Next Generation of Labor
Leaders and Socially Conscious Filmmakers
CINEMA VILLAGE

SATURDAY, MAY 10

A Salute to International Labor Struggles
CINEMA VILLAGE

SUNDAY, MAY 11

A Salute to Mothers: Heroes
of Organizing Unions
CINEMA VILLAGE

MONDAY, MAY 12

Films from the Frontlines
CINEMA VILLAGE

TUESDAY, MAY 13

Equal Pay for Equal Work
CINEMA VILLAGE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14

Immigration and Food Chain Justice
CINEMA VILLAGE
LITHO AUDITORIUM

THURSDAY, MAY 15

WORKERS UNITE FILM FESTIVAL
CELEBRATES GLOBAL LABOR

CINEMA VILLAGE
LITHO AUDITORIUM

FRIDAY, MAY 16

Labor, Art and Memory
LITHO AUDITORIUM

SUNDAY, MAY 18

KILLER COKE SPECIAL EVENT!
JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH

MONDAY, MAY 19

SPECIAL EVENT
1199/SEIU AUDITORIUM

Location One

May 9 to May 15 | CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 East 12th Street @ University Place | Theater One & Theater Three

Location Two

May 14, May 15, and May 16

LITHO AUDITORIUM, 113 University Place @ The Amalgamated Lithographers of America Union Hall

Sunday, May 18 | JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH, 55 Washington Square South | Killer Coke Special Event

Monday, May 19 | 1199/SEIU AUDITORIUM, 1199/310 WEST 43rd Street | Special Event

WWW.WORKERSUNITEFILMFESTIVAL.ORG

Reform and/or Revolution: Imagining a World with Transformative Justice

Harry Belafonte

Angela Davis

Cornel West

Amy Goodman

Kshama Sawant

Chris Hedges

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Immortal Technique

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